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THE BELGRAVIA ANNUAL

CHRISTMAS, 1892

F. V. WHITE & CO.,
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BELGRAVIA ANNUAL.

CHRISTMAS, 1892.

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Caulfield's Crime.

BY A. PERRIN.

CAULFIELD was the worse-tempered fellow I ever met, or even heard of, which is saying a good deal.

He was sulky and vindictive, as well as passionately violent; and yet he was a great friend of mine. People in Koorwallah said it didn't speak well for me, and made remarks about "birds of a feather," with much appreciation of their own discernment.

I suppose, now I come to think of it, that it perhaps may have looked odd for a young civilian like myself, newly landed in India, to be seen so constantly with a man who was senior major in his regiment, and getting on for twenty years older than I was.

Everyone wondered openly what we could find in common to make us such friends; they were sure we could not think alike on any one subject, and it afforded them food for a little uncharitable gossip, which is always a god-send in a second-class up-country station in the North-West Provinces.

No one in Koorwallah knew Caulfield well. Everybody seemed half afraid of him except myself, and there was no denying that he certainly was not the kind of man whose rooms one could walk into without asking, and say "Hullo!" pick up a book or a paper, wander round, looking at the photographs of his sisters, or other fellows' sisters, and then go out again. Not one of the subalterns in his regiment ever spoke to him voluntarily, none of the ladies liked him, they said he was so rude and disagreeable, and never accepted their invitations, and they were sure he had a history, which was very probable and not unusual.

As a matter of fact, he had only lately exchanged into the —th Foot from a cavalry regiment, nobody knew why, nor did he volunteer any information, which deepened the air of mystery surrounding him.

As for myself, I had struck up a friendship with him almost immediately after my arrival in the station. His bungalow was next to mine. They were both ordinary little thatched and whitewashed bachelor's houses, with narrow strips of verandah in front, where a servant was generally to be seen, either washing

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up plates and throwing the dirty water into the drive, or cleaning the lamps and anointing the floor with kerosene oil.

We each had an untidy square of compound, divided from the others by a dusty aloe hedge, in the roots of which lurked pink-nosed little mongooses, with their numerous and ever-increasing families.

There was very little work for me to do during the first two months while I was getting used to the language and the people, and I had ample time for sauntering over to Caulfield's bungalow to examine, with intense interest, his enormous collection of skins and horns and other sporting trophies, which were enough to make any youngster who knew how to handle a gun turn green with envy. He would sit quietly smoking in his chair, and watch me wander round, touching all his favourite treasures, and listening to my voluble chatter with irritating stolidity. He never asked me to come, or pressed me to stay, and yet, in some inexplicable manner, I felt that my visits were not unwelcome to him, except on one or two memorable occasions, when I found him in his worst mood, and he turned me out with a promptitude which caused me to show my face at his door somewhat cautiously the next time I invaded his privacy.

He certainly could not have been called an agreeable companion, and, looking back over the stretch of years which divides those young days of mine from the present, I often wonder what strange fascination drew me so persistently to seek his company. He attracted and interested me, I had a craving to be thought well of by him. I told him petty details concerning my home and family, I read him my people's letters, I confided to him that there was "a girl at home," and I cannot remember receiving anything in the way of encouragement to continue, save an occasional grunt of acquiescence, and sometimes contempt.

He never asked me questions or told me anything about himself, and yet there was a quiet strength in his manner which gave one a secure feeling that whatever confidence was thrust upon him, it would not be betrayed, however ungraciously he might choose to receive it.

Caulfield never went to church. He generally spent his Sundays out shooting, always going off by himself, and returning with a magnificent bag. He had never been known to invite

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anyone to accompany him, for he was madly jealous on the subject of sport, and nothing made him more angry than to hear of another fellow having shot anything that might be called game. He seemed to look upon each jheel,* and every patch of hunting-ground, in the neighbourhood of Koorwallah as his own particular property.

So it may be understood that I was fully alive to the honour conferred on me, when he unexpectedly asked me to go out with him for a three days' shoot.

"I know of a string of jheels," he said, "about thirty miles from here, where the duck and snipe ought to swarm. I saw the spot and marked it down, when I was out black-buck shooting, last week. I've made all arrangements for going out Saturday morning. You can come, too, if you like."

Needless to say, I jumped at this offer. Caulfield had the reputation of being the best shot in the N. W. P. He knew instinctively where game was likely to be found. Good sport was almost a certainty in his company, and, as far as I knew, I was the only fellow he had ever voluntarily invited to go with him.

I boasted about it in the club that evening, and was mercilessly squashed by two or three men who would have given their ears to know the whereabouts of the string of jheels, but who jealously warned me to be careful that Caulfield wasn't after big game, and that he did not begin the expedition by shooting me.

"He'd as soon shoot a man, as anything else," said our doctor, looking over his shoulder to make sure that Caulfield was not in the room. "I never met such a nasty, bad-tempered chap. I believe he's mad!"

And the doctor went on with his billiards, feeling that this speech had wiped off a few old scores he had treasured up against Caulfield for sundry disagreeables which had passed between them.

I left all the arrangements of our expedition to Caulfield. He requested me not to interfere when I began suggesting various things I considered might be useful; and after giving me to understand that I was to be his guest for the three days in question, he despatched a couple of carts on the Friday with a tent wherein we were to eat and sleep, various provisions and

* A large tract of marsh.

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cooking utensils, a pair of camp beds, and some servants, my bedding and bearer being my only contributions to the arrangements.

We rode out the thirty miles on Saturday morning, each having sent a fresh pony on half way, and by this means did the distance in about three hours and a half. Our tent was pitched in the midst of a patch of what is called dâk jungle, clusters of stunted-looking trees with thick, dry bark, and flat shapeless leaves that clattered noisily against each other when stirred by the wind.

It was not a cheerful spot. The soil was principally "usar," that is to say largely mixed with bitter salt which works its way to the surface, and prevents anything but the coarsest of vegetation growing in it. The ground was low and marshy, and the stillness of the air was only broken now and then by the discordant cries of the large jheel birds as they waded majestically in the patches of water in search of their breakfast of small fish.

Caulfield was a different man out there to what he had been in the station. He talked and laughed and acted showman with the most intense satisfaction. He led me away from amongst the stunted trees, and showed me a great sheet of water in the distance, broken in places by little bushy islands and dark patches of reeds, and a mud-coloured native village on the top of a mound overlooking the water at the extreme left.

It was still early, as we had started before six o'clock, and the sun had barely cleared away the thick heavy mist, which was still rising here and there, and rapidly dispersing as the heat increased.

"Isn't it a lovely spot!" said Caulfield, laughing. "Beyond that village the snipe ought to rise from the rice fields in thousands. There's another jheel away to the right of this, and another joining that. We shan't be able to shoot it all in three days, worse luck, and besides it's too big really for only two guns. Come in to breakfast, we mustn't lose time."

An hour later, and we had started. Our guns over our shoulders and a couple of servants behind us carrying the cartridge bags and our luncheon.

We were both in good spirits. We felt we had the certainty of an excellent day's shooting in prospect. But, alas! Luck was against us. The birds were unaccountably wild and few and far between. Some one had been there before us was

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Caulfield's verdict, delivered with disappointed rage, and after tramping and wading all day, we returned weary and crestfallen with only six teal and a mallard between us.

It was undoubtedly very provoking, but Caulfield seemed to take the matter much more to heart than there was any occasion to do. He was filled with hatred of the "scoundrels," who had discovered his pet place and played havoc among the birds, and after dinner sat cursing his luck and the culprits who had spoilt our sport until we were both too sleepy to keep awake any longer, and after our long day of exercise in the open air we neither of us moved in our beds till we were called the next morning.

We had breakfast, and started off, taking a different direction to the previous day, but with no better luck. On and on, and round and round we tramped, with only an occasional shot here and there, scarcely worth mentioning.

At last, about three o'clock in the afternoon, we sat wearily down to eat our luncheon. I was ravenously hungry, and greedily devoured my share of the provisions, but Caulfield hardly ate a mouthful; he sat moodily examining his gun, and taking long pulls now and then at his flask of whiskey.

We were seated on the roots of a huge tamarind tree, close to the village I had noticed on our arrival the morning before. We had been a very long round and had kept the yellow mud walls, on the top of the little mound, in sight as a land-mark. The village was a mile or so from our camp, but there was still a good deal of ground to be shot over between the two.

The place seemed but poorly inhabited, and had a dreary, deserted look about it. Two very old women were sitting watching us with dim, weary eyes, leaning their bent backs against the crumbling mud wall, and a few naked children were playing near them, while one or two bigger boys were driving a herd of lean, bony cattle down towards the water.

Presently another figure came slowly in sight, and advanced towards us. It was a fakir, or holy man, as was evident by the tawny masses of wool which were plaited in amongst his own black locks, and allowed to hang down on either side of his thin, sharp face, the ashes which covered his almost naked body, and the hollow gourd for alms which he held in one hand. His face was long and dog-like, and his pointed yellow teeth glistened in

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the sun as he demanded money in a dismal, monotonous kind of chant.

Caulfield flung a pebble at him and told him roughly to be off. The fakir fixed his wild, restless eyes on him for one moment with a look of bitter animosity, and then walked away, disappearing behind a clump of tall feathery grass.

I felt in my pocket. I had no coins, or I should certainly have given the poor wretch whatever I might have had about me.

"Did you notice that brute's face?" said Caulfield as we rose, preparatory to starting off again. "If there's any truth in the doctrine of the transmigration of souls, he must have been a pariah dog in his former state. He was exactly like one!"

"A jackal more likely," I said carelessly. "It was the face of a wild beast."

Then we walked on again, skirting round the village, and plunging into the damp, soft rice fields. We put up a wisp of snipe which we followed till we had shot them nearly all, and then presently, to our joy, we heard a rush of wings overhead, and a lot of duck went down into a corner of the jheel ahead of us.

"We've got them," whispered Caulfield, in excitement, and we cautiously crept on till the birds were in sight, floating lazily on the still, cold water, pluming their feathers, and calling to one another in their fancied security.

"Now," said Caulfield, crouching down behind the rushes. "Fire into the brown!"

We both raised our guns, and as our fingers were actually on the trigger, there was a mighty splash in the middle of the ducks, and rising with a whir-r-r, they were out of shot in a second.

Caulfield swore. So did I. And then we both turned to see what had caused the splash.

A little way behind us stood the fakir we had seen at luncheon-time. In one hand he was still holding the fragments of the clod of earth he had thrown into the water to warn the ducks of our approach.

Caulfield shook his fist at the man, and abused him freely in Hindustani, but without moving a muscle of his face he turned slowly and disappeared into the jungle.

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Words would not describe Caulfield's rage and disappointment.

"They were pintail, nearly all of 'em," he said, "and the first decent chance we've had to-day. To think of that beastly fakir spoiling it all! What a devilish thing to do!"

"They hate anything being killed, you know," I remarked consolingly, "and I expect there was some spite in it too, because you threw a stone at him."

"Bosh!" said Caulfield. "Come along, we must make haste, it'll be dark soon. I should like to try a place over by those palms before we knock off, but we may as well let the servants go back now, they've had a hard day. Have you got some cartridges in your pocket?"

"Yes, plenty," I answered, and after despatching the two men back to the camp with what little game we had got, we turned to the right and walked in silence till we saw more water glistening between the rough stems of the palms, and in it, to our surprise and delight, a multitude of duck and teal.

With our guns in our hands, we quietly crept towards the water, holding our breath, and fearing that the slightest noise might awake the ducks' suspicions.

The sun had begun to sink in a red ball, and there was a hush over the land as the air became heavy with damp, and the mist stole over the cold still waters of the jheel. Overhead came the first faint cackle of the wild geese, returning home for the night.

Caulfield raised his gun first. He was taking a very steady aim into the middle of the fluttering brown mass of feathers.

Splash! Whir-r-r! A cloud of wings rose in front of us, and wheeled bodily to the right, and the air resounded with the cries of the startled birds.

Someone had thrown a heavy stone in amongst them just as Caulfield had been going to fire.

He turned round very deliberately and looked behind him. Following the direction of his eyes, I saw the long, lanky figure of the fakir, his yellow, jagged teeth and white eye-balls glistening in the pink glow of the setting sun, and a look of fiendish triumph and exultation on his face.

Then there was a loud report, and the next thing I saw was a quivering body on the ground, and wild, terrified eyes staring wide open at me in the agony of death. Caulfield had shot the fakir.

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I shudder when I recall what followed.

The man had been shot through the heart, and died almost immediately, without a sound, save one long, harrowing sigh.

Caulfield stood looking down at what he had done, while I knelt by the body trying hopelessly to persuade myself that life was not extinct. He seemed half-dazed, and it was fully ten minutes before I was able to make him realize what had happened, and the necessity for prompt action.

"You know what it means," he said, touching the body with his foot, "killing a native is no joke in these days. I should come out of it badly. You were witness that I deliberately shot that poor devil. What do you intend doing?"

He spoke in a hard, defiant voice, but there was anxiety written on every line of his features.

"Of course I'll stick by you," I said, after a moment's silence, "nobody need ever know about—about *this* but ourselves, but we shall have to get rid of it."

I gazed at the body with horror. The face, which was becoming rigid, looked more like that of an animal than ever. Caulfield shivered, and glanced uneasily round him.

"Look here," I said, with an effort, "we can't do anything this minute. We'd better hide it in that grass, and come back after dinner. We must get a spade or something of the kind."

"Very well," said Caulfield, humbly. All his old masterful manner had disappeared, and he obeyed me like a child.

Then, when we had performed the repugnant task, and the body had been thrust into the thick grass and covered with clods of hard, dry soil, we walked back to our camp in silence.

I looked at Caulfield as we entered the lighted tent, and could not but feel compassion for him.

His diabolical temper had led him to commit this atrocious deed, and very bitter was the reaction.

He was white and shaking, and looked ten years older than when we had started out that morning.

I gave him some whiskey, and we both sat down and pretended to eat our dinner. We waited for half-an-hour afterwards, to prevent the servants noticing anything peculiar in our manner, and then I sent my bearer outside to see if the moon had risen.

"Yes, sahib," he answered, coming back "it is as light as day."

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During the few seconds of his absence, I had hastily filled the deep pocket of my overcoat with a stout hunting-knife, which I had packed amongst my traps in case we should get any buck shooting, and also a small kitchen chopper left lying on the floor by the bearer after hammering a stiff joint of my camp bed together. I dared not ask the servants for any kind of implement with which to dig.

We left the tent carelessly, as if we were going for a stroll, and found that it was, as the bearer had reported, "as light as day." People who have never been out of England cannot readily imagine the brilliancy of Eastern moonlight. It is almost possible to read by it.

We walked slowly at first, but rapidly quickened our pace as we left the tent behind us, and we both breathed hard as we neared the spot we were making for. Caulfield stopped once or twice, and I half thought he meant to turn back and leave me to do the ghastly business alone. But he came on by my side and never spoke a word until we were close to the tall, coarse grass which hid the fakir's body. Then he suddenly clutched my arm.

"God in Heaven!" he whispered, pointing forwards, "what is that?"

I thought he had gone out of his mind, and it was with difficulty that I refrained from shouting aloud.

The next moment I distinctly saw something moving exactly over the spot where we had concealed the body. I am not what is called a coward, but I must confess that I burst out into a cold perspiration.

There was a rustling in the grass, accompanied by a scraping sound, and Caulfield and I stepped forwards in desperation. I parted the grass with my hands and looked down. There, lying on the fakir's body was a large jackal, grinning and snarling at having been disturbed over his hideous meal.

"Drive it away," whispered Caulfield hoarsely.

But the brute refused to move. Silently it sat there showing its yellow teeth, and reminded me horribly of the wretched man that lay dead beneath its feet. I turned sick and faint.

Then Caulfield shouted at it, and shook the grass, and lifted one of the clods of soil to throw at it.

The jackal rose slowly, and began to slink away. It passed

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close enough for us both to notice that it was an unusually large animal for its kind, and moreover had lost one of its ears. Its coat was plentifully besprinkled with grey, and was rough and mangy.

For more than an hour we worked as if our lives depended on it, using the chopper and my hunting-knife, and being helped by a rift in the ground where the soil had been softened by water running from the jheel, and at last we stood up and stamped down the earth which now covered all traces of Caulfield's crime, with the sweat pouring off our faces.

We had filled the grave with large stones which were lying about on the ground, remnants of some ancient Buddhist temple, long ago forgotten and deserted, so we felt secure that it could not easily be disturbed by animals.

The next morning we returned to Koorwallah, and the secret between Caulfield and myself drew us closer together than before. I suppose what I had seen him do ought to have repulsed and alienated me from him, but the night of that terrible burial we had sat up, one on each side of our little camp table, until daylight crept across the jheels, and Caulfield had told me the story of his life.

It cannot be written down here, but there was the burden of a cruel sorrow in it that explained much to me in his behaviour which I had never understood before.

I passionately pitied the lonely, unloved man, who had brought much of his misery on himself, both now and in the past, through his own ungovernable anger.

He shut himself up more than ever after this, and entirely gave up his shooting trips, which before had been the pleasure of his life, and the only person he ever spoke to, unofficially, was myself.

He took to coming into my bungalow in the evening and sometimes in the middle of the night, and would walk restlessly up and down my rooms, or sit in an easy chair with his face buried in his hands. At times I feared his mind was going, and I dreaded the effect upon him of the long hot-weather days and nights that were creeping gradually nearer.

The end of April came, with its plague of insects and scorching wind. The hours grew long and heavy with the heat, and the dust storms howled and swirled over the baking little station,

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bringing perhaps a few tantalizing drops of rain, or more often leaving the air hotter than ever and thick with copper-coloured dust.

I grew more and more anxious about Caulfield, especially when he came over to me one night when it was too hot to sleep, and asked me if he might stay in my bungalow till the morning.

"I know I may seem an ass," he said, "but I can't stay by myself. I get all sorts of beastly ideas."

I thought he meant that he was tempted to take his own life, and began to try and cheer him up, telling him scraps of gossip, and encouraging him to talk, when a sound outside made us both start. It was only the weird, plaintive cry of a jackal, but Caulfield sprang to his feet shaking all over.

"There it is!" he exlaimed hoarsely, "it's followed me over here. Jack," he continued, turning his haggard, sleepless eyes on me, "every night for the last week that brute has come and howled round my house. You know what I mean. It's the one we saw *that* night."

He was terribly excited, and, I could see, almost off his head.

"Nonsense, my dear chap," I said, pushing him back into the chair, "you've got fever. Jackals come round my house and howl all night, and all day too. That's nothing."

"Look here, Jack," said Caulfield, very calmly, "I've no more fever than you have, and if you think I'm delirious you're mistaken." Then he lowered his voice, "I looked out one night and saw it, and I tell you *it had only one ear*."

In spite of my own common sense, and the certainty that Caulfield was not himself, my blood ran cold, and, after I had succeeded in quieting him and getting him to sleep on my bed, I lay on the sofa going over every detail of that fearful night in the jungle again and again, try as I would to chase it from my thoughts.

Once or twice after this Caulfield came to me and repeated the same tale. He swore he was being haunted by the jackal we had driven away from the fakir's body, and took it into his head that the soul of the man he had murdered had entered into the animal, and was trying to obtain vengeance in that form.

Then he suddenly stopped coming near me, and when I went to see him he would hardly speak, and seemed to take no pleasure in my visits as formerly.

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I thought perhaps he was offended because I had always laughed at his hallucinations, and treated them as, what they undoubtedly must have been, mere fancies.

I urged him to see a doctor or take leave, but he angrily refused to do either, and declared I should very soon drive him mad altogether if I bothered him much more.

After this I left him alone for a couple of days, and on the third night, when my conscience was pricking me for having neglected him, and I was preparing to go over to his bungalow, his bearer came rushing in with a face of terror and distress, and begged me to come at once. He had already sent a man off for the doctor, as he feared his master was very ill. I arrived at Caulfield's bungalow just as the doctor, who lived only across the road, appeared, and together we entered the queer museum of a house, literally lined with horns and skins and curiosities. Caulfield was lying unconscious on his bed.

"He had a kind of fit, sahib," said the trembling bearer, and proceeded to explain how his master had behaved.

The doctor bent over the bed.

"Do you happen to know if he's been bitten by a dog, or anything lately?" he said, looking up at me.

"Not to my knowledge," I answered, but the faint wail of a jackal out across the plain struck a superstitious chill to my heart.

For twenty-four hours we stayed with him, watching the terrible struggles we were powerless to avert, and which lasted until the end came, and brought a merciful peace to the poor, harassed mind and body.

He was never able to speak after the first paroxysm, which had occurred before we arrived, so we could not learn from him whether he had ever been bitten or not, neither could the doctor discover any kind of scar on his body which might have been made by the teeth of an animal, and yet there was no doubt that Caulfield's death was due to hydrophobia.

As we stood in the next room after all was over, drinking the dead man's whiskey and soda (which we badly needed), we questioned the bearer again and again, but he could tell us little or nothing. His master did not keep dogs, and he did not know of his ever having been bitten by one, but there had been a mad jackal about the place nearly three weeks before, though he did not think his master had known of it.

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"It couldn't have been that," said the doctor, "or we should have heard about it."

"No," I answered mechanically, "it couldn't have been that."

It was nearly three weeks ago that Caulfield had ceased to come near me and had taken such a strange dislike to my going to his house. I began to think I must be going off my head too, for nobody but a lunatic could for a moment have seriously entertained such a notion as crossed my brain at that moment.

I went into the bedroom to take a last look at poor Caulfield's thin, white face, with its ghastly, hunted expression, and to give a farewell pressure to his cold, heavy hand before I left him, for the doctor had urged me to go home, saying that there was now nothing more that I could do to help him. I picked up a lantern after this, and stepped out into the dark verandah.

As I did so, something came silently round the corner of the house, and stood in my path.

I raised my lantern, and caught a glimpse of a mass of grey fur, two fiery yellow eyes, and glistening teeth. I saw that it was only a stray jackal, and struck at it with my stick, but instead of running away, it passed silently by me and entered Caulfield's room. The light fell on the animal's head as it entered the open door—*one of its ears was missing*.

In a frenzy I rushed back into the house, calling loudly for the doctor and the servants.

"I saw a jackal come in here!" I exclaimed excitedly, searching round Caulfield's room. "It must be in this room—I saw it go in this very minute. Hunt it out at once!"

Every nook and corner was examined, but there was no jackal, nor even a trace of one.

"Go home to bed, my boy," said the doctor, looking at me kindly. "This business has shaken your nerves. Keep quiet for a bit. Your imagination's beginning to play you tricks. Good-night."

"Good-night," I answered, wearily, and I went slowly back to my bungalow, trying to persuade myself that he was right.

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